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ABSTRACT

Designed to promote new direction, accountability, and support for California's community colleges, this concept paper outlines six major legislative initiatives that should be integrated into the Community College Reform Act of 1986. The paper urges that: (1) the mission of community colleges must be given focus, and, for the first time, priorities within the mission must be established; (2) accountability between the student and the college must be strengthened, and the concept of open access must be given new meaning through enactment of matriculation reform; (3) responsibilities must be assigned for numerous other academic, student, and personnel reforms to be implemented by agencies other than the legislature; (4) governance responsibilities of the Board of Governors and local districts must be clarified, and lines of accountability must be established through the creation of a postsecondary community college system; (5) policies pertaining to the employment of academic and administrative staff in the colleges must be reformed to make them more postsecondary in nature, by such changes as eliminating credentials, lengthening the probationary period for tenure, and establishing new policies for the employment of part-time instructors; and (6) a more accountable and flexible method for financing community colleges must be provided. The paper concludes that the state representatives must fuel the good intentions of the community colleges with a package of unmistakably clear directions so that the colleges can proceed with clarity of mission and quality programs. (RO)

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JC 860 377

THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE REFORM ACT OF 1986:

A CONCEPT PAPER

California's community colleges, after nearly a decade of uncertainty and upheaval, stand at the threshold of renewal and reemergence. The issues and problems facing the colleges have now been thoroughly studied, not only by the Commission for Review of the Master Plan for Higher Education, but also by numerous other agencies and organizations. The time has come to embrace necessary change and leave behind this difficult period of ambiguity and confusion.

The 68 recommendations of the Master Plan Commission's Community College Reassessment Study tell us unmistakably that absent major reform in legislative policies, community colleges will lack sufficient direction and support to enable them to remain effective and accountable educational institutions. Conditions have changed such that many current legislative policies do not well serve the community colleges or the people of the State. It is, therefore, essential to equip the community colleges with a clear set of directions and to then hold them accountable for meeting these expectations. To this end, we call for the Community College Reform Act of 1986.

The Community College Reform Act of 1986 should be an integrated package of six major legislative initiatives to bring about new direction, accountability and support for community colleges.

(1) The mission of community colleges must be given focus, and, for the first time, priorities within the mission must be established;

(2) Accountability between the student and the college must be strengthened, and the concept of open access must be given new meaning through enactment of the matriculation reform;

(3) Responsibilities must be assigned for numerous other academic, student, and personnel reforms to be implemented by agences other than the Legislature. By fixing responsibilities and timelines, the Legislature will ensure that many critical non-legislative reforms are carried out.

(4) Governance responsibilities of the Board of Governors and local districts must be clarified, and lines of accountability must be established (both within the system and to the State) through the creation of a postsecondary community college system;

(5) Policies pertaining to the employment of academic and administrative staff in the colleges must be reformed and made more postsecondary in nature by such changes as eliminating credentials, lengthening the probationary period for tenure, and establishing new policy for the employment of part-time instructors; and

(6) A new more accountable and flexible method for financing community colleges must be provided.

The six major initiatives of the Community College Reform Act of 1986 should be followed up in 1987 with a bill that ensures that all community college portions of the Education Code are consistent with the policy and direction established by the Act. Together, these two bills will constitute the most significant legislation ever enacted for California's community colleges.

In more detail, the major changes to be accomplished in the Community College Reform Act of 1986 include:

Mission

Neither the community colleges nor the people of the State continue to be well served by a community college mission statement that is so permissive that it invites the colleges to be all things to all people.

The mission of community colleges must be significantly more focused. The highest priority within the mission should be established as the provision of rigorous, high-quality degree and certificate curricula in lower division arts and sciences and in vocational and

occupational fields. New emphasis should thus be placed on preparing students for transfer or for employment.

Remedial instruction and services necessary to help students succeed at the postsecondary level should be established as "essential" functions; and adult education at less-than-collegiate levels should be "authorized" within legislatively prescribed parameters. Finally, community services offerings should be authorized so long as they are self-supporting, and so long as they don't detract the college from fulfilling the highest priorities within the mission.

New Meaning and Accountability Regarding Open Access

Neither the community colleges nor the people of the State are well served by an open access policy that is relatively silent on what happens to a student once he or she decides to attend a community college.

The Act should reaffirm the commitment to open access, but recognize that to be meaningful, access must be to a quality system that helps ensure the success of every student who enrolls. The responsibility for success falls not only on the student but also the college. The colleges have a responsibility to provide meaningful guidance and an appropriate framework within which students can develop their educational goals, pursue appropriate courses, and obtain support services necessary for success. Given this framework, students have the responsibility to be serious about their studies and to be the primary motivators in their own success. The Act should achieve these ends by establishing and funding a matriculation reform, and by modifying the legislative policy on open access to reflect a commitment to meaningful access and improved student accountability.

Responsibilities of Other Entities in Contributing to Reform

Not all aspects of community college reform are appropriate for legislative resolution. In fact, as reflected in the recommendations of the Master Plan Commission, many of the reforms should be carried out by the Board of Governors and the colleges themselves, working in accordance with broad legislative direction. To ensure that these reforms will be completed in an effective and timely manner, however, it is appropriate for the Community College Reform Act of 1986 to fix specific expectations and timelines.

The following are some of the reform objectives appropriate to specific legislative direction:

(1) Requiring new policy on remediation, including skills levels appropriate for courses and stronger probation and dismissal standards, to be adopted by the Board of Governors;

(2) Requiring the establishment of a transfer core curriculum;

(3) Overcoming underrepresentation in vocational education programs;

(4) Strengthening articulation with high schools;

(5) Developing a more effective plan for staff affirmative action; and

(6) Requiring the Board of Governors to conduct a comprehensive review of the Education Code.

These and other specific legislative directions can be incorporated into the bill with specific timelines and expectations of legislative intent.

A Postsecondary Community College System

The Legislature must recognize and begin to deal with the fact that the current body of some 3,000 statutes governing community colleges treats these institutions alternatively as secondary schools and postsecondary colleges. Statutes fixing the postsecondary mission and functions of the community colleges, as well as statutes fixing the

postsecondary responsibilities of the Board of Governors, have been superimposed over statutes creating the community colleges as secondary schools. As a consequence, the roles of Board of Governors and local districts are confused. Also, the lines of accountability between the Board of Governors and the legislative and executive branches of government are unclear.

To improve community college governance and accountability, the Act should create the "California Community Colleges," a postsecondary education system which consists of local community college districts (governed by boards of trustees) and a coordinating entity (established pursuant to Article IX, Section 14 of the California Constitution, and governed by the Board of Governors). This change would essentially discontinue the Board of Governors as a state agency and reestablish it as part of the community college educational system. The powers and duties of both the Board of Governors and local districts would be drawn from existing law, by reenacting key powers and duties of local boards and the Board of Governors that have been enacted since the Board of Governors was created in 1967.

The effect of these changes would be to create a system of community colleges, distinct from the State. The Board of Governors would be responsible for providing leadership and direction to the colleges, as well as providing accountability to the State; and local districts would be responsible to the Board of Governors and their communities for operating the colleges.

In concert with clarifying the postsecondary nature of the Board of Governors and establishing it as part of the community college system, the legislation should also revise the composition of the Board as well as the term lengths of members. The composition of the Board of

Governors should be expanded to include as ex-officio members the Governors, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the Assembly, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the Chancellor of the system; also, terms of Board members should be expanded from four to eight years.

To accommodate the transfer of authority from the Legislature to the Board of Governors, it is necessary to strengthen accountability, communication, and oversight between the Board and the legislative and executive branches of government. The extension of terms to eight years will afford greater continuity to policymaking to a board which assumes greater authority and responsibility.

Finally, to assure that other community college portions of the Education Code are consistent with this new community college governance structure, the follow-up bill in 1987 should include all necessary changes to reflect and technically implement this structure.

Employment Policies

Neither the community colleges nor the people of the State are well served by an extensive body of statutes which continues to treat the academic and administrative staff of community colleges as K-12 employees. California is the only state to retain a system of credentialling for community college faculty and administrators. In virtually every other postsecondary setting, new full-time faculty must serve a reasonable period of probation (usually four to six years), during which they can be thoroughly evaluated by their peers as well as by students and administrators.

To initiate the revamping of community college employment policies, the Act should make several key changes in 1986, with the remainder to

follow in 1987. Credential requirements should be eliminated, as of a specified future date. For all faculty hired on or after a specified date, the probationary period for obtaining tenure should be fixed by regulation of the Board of Governors, to be set at not less than 4 nor more than 6 years. Finally, the current restriction on the use of part-time instructors should be repealed and replaced by a statute which directs the Board to establish policy on the use of part-time instructors in the community colleges.

Community College Finance

Neither the community colleges nor the people of the State are well served by a highly complicated and inflexible statutory funding mechanism that is driven almost entirely by the K-12 concept of how many students are sitting in a classroom. The method of financing community colleges must be more sensitive to the other costs involved in delivering quality education, and greater responsibility for developing and applying the details of this method should be delegated to the Board of Governors.

To bring about this change in governance authority over the finance mechanism, the Legislature should sunset most existing statutory provisions on community college finance and direct the Board of Governors to establish in regulation, after consultation with State and college officials, the formulas for allocating funds to individual community college districts. The formulas should be used to determine the annual systemwide budget requests and to apportion funds to districts once appropriated.

The Legislature, it should be recognized, can be as directive as it finds necessary in specifying what the Board of Governors is to include

in its regulations on the finance formula. It should also be recognized that both the Board's regulations as well as the statutory directive will be subject to continuing legislative review and oversight.

It is time to leave behind our long period of ambiguity and confusion. The community colleges stand prepared to proceed with clarity of mission and quality of programs. But in order to achieve these worthy aims, our State representatives, those entrusted with the task of setting us on course, must fuel our good intentions with a package of unmistakably clear directions. The Legislature must act, and we must be prepared to shape and accept the necessary reforms.

ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGES

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